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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, here we are on the eve of the autumnal equinox. Yes, the summer is almost officially over for another year, and autumn just around the corner. It's a nice time of the year - a little cooler, and the leaves start to turn color. The downside is having to clean up all those leaves! But, I can deal with that "little" inconvenience.

So, still enjoying U.S. politics? The presidential race continues to heat up with the candidates spending a lot of their time bashing one another daily. And, each candidate is finding various small ways to do themselves in. And even here in Massachusetts, I've been enjoying the senatorial race - another battle that will likely go down to the wire, Brown vs. Warren.

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Sony Plans Slimmer PS3 Before Year End!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Sony Says No to PS3 Price Cut!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Sony Plans Slimmer PlayStation 3 Before Year End

Sony Corp. is introducing a smaller, slimmer and lighter version of its PlayStation 3 home console ahead of the year-end holidays as it gears up for growing competition in games from smartphones.

The announcement Wednesday from the Japanese electronics and entertainment company comes a day ahead of the annual Tokyo Game Show, where game makers show their wares. But the iPhone 5 smartphone from Apple Inc. is hogging much of the attention, already drawing long lines for pre-orders at some retailers, and more lines are expected ahead of Friday's launch.

The new PlayStation 3, closer to the size of a laptop, is half the size of the original model, introduced in 2006. It also offers more hard-drive memory at 500 gigabytes and 250 gigabytes, up from the current 320 GB and 160 GB options.

The global rollout starts Sept. 25 in North America, where the 250 GB version will sell for $269. The other version sells for $299 from Oct. 30. In Japan, the models go on sale Oct. 4 for 29,980 yen ($380) and 24,980 yen ($316).

Tokyo-based Sony is struggling as its other electronics businesses get battered by competition from Apple's iPhones as well as by cheaper Asian rivals.

The maker of Bravia TVs and Walkman portable players posted its worst loss in its 66-year history for the fiscal year ended in March its fourth straight year of red ink.

The company is banking on games to help steer a turnaround. President Kazuo Hirai spent much of his career leading the game division.

To woo consumers, Sony is slashing the price on its PlayStation Portable, or PSP, mobile device as it increasingly focuses on its upgraded PlayStation Vita, which went on sale last year, for on-the-go games.

The PSP, which first went on sale in 2004, comes down Thursday to 13,800 yen ($175) in Japan from 16,800 yen ($213). There is no change to the U.S. price now at about $130.

Sony plans to expand entertainment based on cloud computing, which offers storage and other computer services over the network, after recently acquiring Gaikai Inc., a U.S. game company.

The PlayStation Vita won't be getting any upgrades just yet. But it will be available in new colors, blue and red, in addition to white and black, but only in Japan.

Some speculation is buzzing about a PlayStation 4, possibly before the end of next year, but officials were mum on that topic.

The PS Vita, which has a touch-panel, allows users to live-stream video and works as an electronic book function for colorful comics, according to Sony.

But Sony has already slashed its PS Vita sales target for this fiscal year through March 2013, to 12 million units, down from 16 million that was given three months earlier.

In lowering the target, Sony pointed to the economic slowdown, especially in Europe. But it also noted the intense competition from smartphones and social-networking entertainment.

Hiroshi Kawano, who heads Sony's game business in Japan, said the

networking feature of PlayStation 3 allows users to enjoy millions of tunes, karaoke at home and a growing library of movies.

"Even after six years, the PlayStation 3 has not lost momentum and continues to deliver powerful home entertainment," he said at a Tokyo hall.

Sony Says No to PlayStation 3 Price Cut

Gamers were left scratching their heads when Sony announced its new slimmer PlayStation 3 would actually cost more than the model it was replacing. With these types of products shrinking, it s usually the case that the reduction in build materials means savings pass on to the consumer. Not so the new $269.99 PlayStation 3 will replace the old and out of production $249.99 PS3. Granted, consumers will get a copy of Uncharted 3: Drake s Deception and a 250GB hard drive instead of a 160GB one, but why hasn t the six-year-old console hit the $199 price point yet? After all, the 4GB Xbox 360 is already sold for $199.99.

Sony Computer Entertainment America vice president of marketing, handhelds and home consoles John Koller told Engadget that the company has no plans to drop the six-year-old console s price any time in the foreseeable future.

There s no price drop formally, but the thing that s been happening in the market over the last year or so is that there s been so many retail price promotions, and so many different gift card offers and all those things, being done by all of us (Microsoft, Nintendo and Sony), that we ve heard from our consumer, Enough with all these weird price moves. What we really want is content and games and value, Koller told Engadget.

That s a bummer. It looks like shoppers looking for a PS3 this holiday will have to settle for whatever deals retailers dish out instead of relying on hard price cut.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Iranian Hackers Target Bank of America, JPMorgan, Citi

Iranian hackers have repeatedly attacked Bank of America Corp , JPMorgan Chase & Co and Citigroup Inc over the past year, as part of a broad cyber campaign targeting the United States, according to people familiar with the situation.

The attacks, which began in late 2011 and escalated this year, have primarily been "denial of service" campaigns that disrupted the banks’

websites and corporate networks by overwhelming them with incoming web traffic, said the sources.

Whether the hackers have been able to inflict more serious damage on computer networks or steal critical data is not yet known. The sources said there was evidence suggesting the hackers targeted the banks in retaliation for their enforcement of Western economic sanctions against Iran.

Iran has beefed up its cyber capabilities after its nuclear program was damaged in 2010 by the Stuxnet virus, widely believed to have been developed by the United States. Tehran has publicly advertised its intentions to build a cyber army and encouraged private citizens to hack against Western countries.

The attacks on the three largest U.S. banks originated in Iran, but it is not clear if they were launched by the state, groups working on behalf of the government, or "patriotic" citizens, according to the sources, who requested anonymity as they were not authorized to discuss the matter.

They said the attacks shed new light on the potential for Iran to lash out at Western nations' information networks.

"Most people didn't take Iran seriously. Now most people are taking them very seriously," said one of the sources, referring to Iran's cyber capabilities.

Iranian officials were not available for comment. Bank of America, JPMorgan and Citigroup declined to comment, as did officials with the Pentagon, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Security Agency and Secret Service.

A U.S. financial services industry group this week warned banks, brokerages and insurers to be on heightened alert for cyber attacks after the websites of Bank of America and JPMorgan Chase's experienced unexplained service disruptions.

NBC reported late on Thursday that the Iranian government was behind these attacks, citing U.S. national security sources. Reuters could not verify that independently.

Tensions between the United States and Iran, which date back to the revolution in 1979 that resulted in the current Islamic republic, have escalated in recent years as Washington led the effort to prevent Tehran from getting a nuclear bomb and imposed tough economic sanctions.

Denial-of-service campaigns are among the oldest types of cyber attacks and do not require highly skilled computer programmers or advanced expertise, compared with sophisticated and destructive weapons like Stuxnet.

But denial-of-service attacks can still be very disruptive: If a bank's website is repeatedly shut down, the attacks can hurt its reputation, affect customer retention and cause revenue losses as customers cannot open accounts or conduct other business.

Bank of America, Citigroup and JPMorgan Chase have consulted the FBI, Department of Homeland Security and National Security Agency on how to strengthen their networks in the face of the Iranian attacks, the sources said. It was not clear whether law enforcement agencies are formally investigating the attacks.

The Iranian attackers may have used denial-of-service to distract the victims from other, more destructive assaults that have yet to be uncovered, the sources said.

Frank Cilluffo, who served as homeland security adviser to U.S. President George W. Bush, told Reuters that he knows of "cyber reconnaissance" missions that have come from Iran but declined to give specifics.

"It is yet to be seen whether they have the wherewithal to cause significant damage," said Cilluffo, who is now director of the Homeland Security Policy Institute at George Washington University.

Security experts said Iran's cyber capabilities are not as sophisticated as those of the China, Russia, the United States or many of its Western allies. Jim Lewis, a former U.S. Foreign Service officer, said Iran has been testing its cyber technology against Israel and other Gulf states in recent years.

"It's like the nuclear program: It isn't particularly sophisticated but it makes progress every year," said Lewis, who is a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic & International Studies.

German Watchdog Warns of Internet Explorer Breach

The German government agency overseeing IT safety is warning of a security breach in Microsoft's Internet Explorer and recommending people use other browsers until the problem is fixed.

The browser's "weak point is already being used for targeted attacks," the Federal Office for Information Security warned, adding that the code behind the attack is freely available online and might therefore spread rapidly.

A spokesman for Microsoft Corp. said Tuesday the company is aware of the issue and is working on soon rolling out a software update, a so-called patch, to fix the browser's security features.

"This is not a massive problem. There have been only a small number of targeted attacks," said spokesman Thomas Baumgaertner. He could not provide a figure of the number of attacks recorded so far.

The browser is used by hundreds of millions of consumers and workers around the world.

In its warning published late Monday, Germany's IT watchdog called on people using Windows XP or Windows 7 operating systems and Internet Explorer versions 7, 8 or 9 to switch to alternative browsers until Microsoft updates the browser's security features.

Attackers lure users to an infected website, for example through an emailed link. Visiting the website then allows hackers to introduce codes to take control of the user's computer, the BSI agency said.

Baumgaertner noted that people should always be vigilant when clicking on links from unknown sources. He also added that many antivirus programs might already be updated to protect their users against attacks through

the browser loophole.

Internet Explorer Fixes Security Issue to Protect Against Hackers

Microsoft has developed a fix for an Internet Explorer security issue that allowed hackers to attack some users' computers.

The company released on Wednesday night a "Fix It" download to address the issue and protect against hacks. In the meantime, Microsoft said it also plans to roll out a full Internet Explorer update that "will not only reinforce the issue that the Fix It addressed, but cover other issues as well."

Earlier this week, it was revealed that Internet Explorer had been hit with a zero-day exploit, which takes advantage of a security hole within websites to carry out attacks. This means that anyone using IE to visit a website that has malicious links could have their computer hacked.

While the vast majority of people are not impacted by this issue, today Microsoft provided a temporary fix that can be downloaded with one easy click and offers immediate protection," Microsoft spokesperson Yunsun Wee said in a statement. "We will also provide a permanent solution for customers that will be automatically enabled on Friday, Sept. 21, 2012.

Until recently, Internet Explorer was the most popular web browser used worldwide. According to StatCounter, Chrome surpassed Internet Explorer as the most popular browser around the world in May 2012.

Twitter Surrenders Occupy Activist Tweets to NY Court

Twitter handed over the private tweets of an Occupy activist to a New York judge Friday after being threatened with contempt. The surrender ended a months-long standoff between the social media company and the Criminal Court in Manhattan.

The tweets, written last October by Occupy activist Malcolm Harris, are no longer available online.

Reuters reported that the Manhattan district attorney s office hoped to use the tweets undermine Harris claim that police intentionally led protestors onto the Brooklyn Bridge in order to arrest them.

Harris tweets were handed to Manhattan Criminal Court Judge Matthew Sciarrino in an inch-high stack of paper sealed in an envelope. The envelope will remain sealed while Harris appeal is heard in the coming week.

The move comes as a blow to Twitter, which is often held up by technology futurists and free speech activists as a paramount of the free flow of information.

The case is just one of numerous examples of governments demanding information from social media companies about their users.

Facebook Tightens Privacy To Satisfy Irish Regulator

Facebook Inc has tightened up its privacy controls sufficiently to satisfy a review by the body that regulates the social networking company outside North America, removing the immediate threat of legal challenges.

The world's biggest social network makes most of its money from advertising, but has to walk a fine line in doing so by avoiding giving its over 950 million users the impression it is invading their privacy to boost revenue.

It was told by Ireland's Data Protection Commissioner last December to overhaul privacy protection for its users outside the United States and Canada, after a probe found its privacy policies were too complex and lacked transparency.

The regulator said it was particularly encouraged by the decision to turn off a piece of facial-recognition technology, the so-called "tag suggest" feature, for new users in the European Union and by next month, existing users as well.

The Irish watchdog, which oversees Facebook's activities because the group's non-U.S. business is headquartered in Dublin, said on Friday most of its instructions had been adopted, with progress still to be made on others over the next four weeks.

"We would hope that the progress reported in the review will have dealt with the various complaints we have received in relation to Facebook Ireland," Ireland's Data Protection Commissioner Billy Hawkes told a conference call.

Privacy cases can prove costly for social networking sites like Facebook, which was the first American company to debut with a value of more than $100 billion in its initial public offering in May, before its share price slumped on an uncertain outlook.

It had to settle a case for $9.5 million after its now defunct "Beacon" service violated its members' privacy rights by not requiring their consent to allow the company to broadcast their internet activity.

Ireland's watchdog had said the company risked facing legal action under European privacy laws if it failed to comply and said on Friday the social network would have to continue to engage with it as new features are introduced.

In its report, the regulator said Facebook had made particular progress in providing better transparency for its users, handing them more control over settings and the ability to more readily access their personal data.

Facebook's director of policy for Europe, the Middle East and Africa Richard Allan told Reuters the company was committed to bringing the tag suggest feature back once it had taken steps to put it in line with EU guidance.

Allan said the move should also remove the threat of legal action from Germany's Hamburg Data Commissioner over the facial-recognition feature.

"Clearly the announcement today means we think there are no grounds for them to proceed with that," Allan said, adding that Facebook's privacy changes would have no impact at all on its advertising strategy.

The regulator said the outstanding areas of concern included minimizing the potential for advertising to target users based on words that could be considered as sensitive personal data, but both it and Facebook said they were confident that these issues would be dealt with speedily.

An Austrian-based group of student activists, europe-v-facebook, which has succeeded in extracting some concessions on privacy from Facebook, said the law had been waived for the tech group.

"The Irish ODPC says that Facebook has not fully implemented the suggestions and that further work has to be done, but there seem to be no consequences or fines for not complying with these suggestions," said the group in a statement.

Apple OS X Mountain Lion Update Brings Facebook Integration

Facebook and the Mac just officially upgraded their relationship status. Apple has pushed out a new update to OS X Mountain Lion that includes Facebook integration.

Version 10.8.2 incorporates Facebook sharing into many system components and Apple-made apps. Users will be able to sign into Facebook via their System Preferences, just like they do with Twitter now in Mountain Lion. Once signed in, several new abilities are unleashed.

Apps such as Safari, Preview and Contacts will now include a "Facebook" option in their sharing, and Apple says third-party developers will be able to create apps that exploit the feature. Sharing is also built into the Notification Center, letting you see Facebook notifications and post status updates directly from there (without launching specific apps).

OS X's Game Center, which Mountain Lion adopted from iOS, will now let you play games against Facebook friends. You can also "Like" a game right from the Game Center.

Although Facebook is the big new thing in OS X 10.8.2, also notable is improved communication with iPhones. The update will make sure iMessages (text messages from other iOS or OS X devices) sent to your phone number show up on your Mac. You'll also now be able to take FaceTime video calls on your Mac even if they were sent to your phone number. One caveat: Your iPhone will need iOS 6, which just launched today.

The new Mountain Lion brings other functionality such as Power Nap support for older MacBook Air models, shared reminders with other Apple account holders, better sorting abilities for Notes, and seven new languages for Dictation, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish, Korean, Canadian English, Canadian French and Italian.

Office 2013 Packages

Microsoft is revealing the final pricing structure for its Office 2013 packages today. After introducing a preview of Office 2013 in July, Microsoft is planning to offer a subscription version of Office 2013, under the Office 365 Home Premium branding, for $8.33 per month ($99.99 per year). The subscription package will include all of the typical Office applications including Outlook but with the ability to use the software on five PCs or Macs. Microsoft is also bundling in 60 minutes of Skype world calling per month and an Office on demand feature that lets you stream the apps to Windows 7 or Windows 8 PCs. One additional benefit to the subscription version is the promise of regular updates and new features Microsoft tells us "new capabilities will be added multiple times per year."

"Microsoft really wants you to subscribe, but there are standalone versions too"

If you're used to buying boxed standalone software, then Microsoft is still offering Office 2013 in a similar way to previous versions. Prices start at $139.99 for the Office Home and Student 2013 edition that includes Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and OneNote. If you're an Outlook fan then you'll need Office Home and Business 2013 which is priced at $219.99. There is also an Office Professional 2013 edition that includes all the apps in Home and Business plus Access and Publisher for $399.99. The standalone versions will not include access to a streaming on demand version of Office, nor regular upgrades like the subscription version, and can only be installed on one PC.

Following recent rumors, Microsoft is also launching its Office 2013 upgrade program on October 19th. Those who purchase Office 2010 or Office for Mac 2011 will qualify for a one year Office 365 Home Premium, or equivalent Office 2013 offering, when the next version of Office is generally available. Microsoft isn't saying when Office 2013 will ship, but a spokesperson tells us that it will be made available in 277 markets for consumers in over 70 currencies, and that most retailers across Europe and the United States will offer a Product Key Card rather than a traditional DVD box. Office 2013 will also be made available to purchase online.

Send a Message With the World's Cutest Four-Legged Font

Got a message for someone special? Instead of saying it with flowers or diamonds, why not say it with puppies?

Puppy Text spells out a message using images of multiple puppies aligned in the shape of each letter or number.

Symbols such as hashtags or asterisks are not available, because - as the site states when you try - "puppies don't bend that way."

Once the message is complete, users can share it on Facebook, via email or copy and paste a preview link anywhere else. There's also an iPhone app available for $1.29, for sending puppy texts on-the-go.

The site claims that no puppies were harmed in the making of this service.

Printable Lasers Made Possible with Basic Inkjet Technology

University of Cambridge scientists have quite literally reinvented the term "laser printer" with a new technology that allows liquid crystal lasers to be printed through the same process as you may use in your printer at home. Ironically enough, this laser printing method is done through an inkjet printer that distributes the liquid crystals just as it would regular ink. When the crystals are aligned just right and provided with an adequate power source, they create tiny, individual lasers.

Aside from the possibility of accurately recreating a true-to-life "Star Wars" or "G.I. Joe" scene on a piece of paper, these printable lasers can be used for anything from lighted displays to smart thin surfaces on a much smaller budget. Can we just go ahead and coin the term "smart art" right now?

Why Are 5 Million Kids on Facebook If It Doesn’t Want Them?

Facebook has an ugly little secret, a number disclosed nowhere in its voluminous filings to become a public company and now only vaguely addressed by corporate officials.

An estimated 5.6 million Facebook clients - about 3.5 percent of its U.S. users - are children who the company says are banned from the site.

Facebook and many other web sites bar people under age 13 because the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) requires web sites to give special treatment to children 12 or younger. The law aims to stop marketers prying personal information from children or using their data to advertise to them. Sites must get parental permission before allowing children to enter, and must take steps to protect privacy.

Facebook declines to acknowledge that many of its efforts to block children are not working.

The issue has taken on new relevance as the Federal Trade Commission finalizes rules to further restrict companies and Web sites that target youths or are geared to young audiences.

Facebook, the world’s leading social media company with 955 million users, has said that the law does not apply to it because it explicitly restricts use of its site to people aged 13 and older.

Facebook has made some progress in identifying preteens and excluding them from the site. A June Consumer Reports study showed that Facebook eliminates as many as 800,000 users under age 13 in a year through its tiered screening process, which the company declines to describe.

The study still estimates 5.6 million children are on Facebook, a figure that experts say includes many who create accounts with help from their parents.

The Consumer Reports data comes from a January 2012 survey of 2,002 adults with home Internet. Participants were chosen by TNS, a research firm. The margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points.

"It’s not surprising to us to see 12-year-olds sneaking onto Facebook," said FTC Chairman Jon Leibowitz, saying the situation was "particularly complicated" if parents helped them. "Is it troubling? In some ways it is. Is it a story in black and white? Not really."

A Reuters test of Facebook’s signup process shows that a child could bypass the site’s screening features with relative ease. The site effectively blocked a fictitious sign-up from an underage prospective user. But after an hour’s wait, the site accepted a sign-up using the same name, email, password and birthday but citing a different birth year.

Facebook declined to discuss the data or describe its efforts to outlaw children. Spokesman Frederic Wolens said in an email that Facebook is "committed to improving protections for all young people online".

Larry Magid, who serves on Facebook’s advisory board and co-directs the Internet group Connect Safely, said he and others studied the issue for a year and found no way to tell if children were lying online.

"The only solution that I am aware of is to access some sort of national ID or school records," he said. "There are good reasons that we don’t do this. ... I’m sure this is really easy to do in totalitarian regimes."

Senator Richard Blumenthal, an outspoken privacy advocate whose youngest child is 18, said children’s vulnerability to potential sexual predators and susceptibility to advertising were reasons to keep the 12-and under set off most web sites. "Our children were not on Facebook at that age, and they would not be now," he said.

When gullible preteens or "tweens" go online they often reveal sensitive data, said Kathryn Montgomery, who teaches at American University and was an early advocate of the 1998 COPPA Tlaw.

"What we hoped to do with these kinds of rules is to get companies to act responsibly toward kids. It’s not easy to do," said Montgomery.

Facebook now boasts 158 million U.S. users, according to May figures from the data firm comScore. If the site more effectively banned children, it could stand to lose about 3.5 percent of its U.S. market.

Ironically, one reason it’s easy to game Facebook’s screening process is the law passed to protect children. COPPA bars companies from saving most data on children. The FTC has said it would look skeptically on companies saving childrens’ names or email addresses even if the data simply helped them prevent children logging onto their sites.

Children who aren’t savvy enough to game Facebook’s system often get parental help, according to a 2011 study headed by Danah Boyd, a senior researcher at Microsoft Research. She found that 55 percent of parents of 12-year-olds said that their child was on Facebook and that 76 percent of those had helped the child gain access.

"Many recent reports have highlighted just how difficult it is to enforce age restrictions on the Internet, especially when parents want their children to access online content and services," said Facebook’s Wolens.

On Facebook, children are exposed to advertising for sugary, high-fat foods, the kind increasingly pulled from children’s television shows.

"We found lots of food products on Facebook being advertised, including

many which are targeted to children," said Jennifer Harris, director of marketing initiatives at Yale University's Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity.

One is Kellogg's new Krave cereal, a product which is roughly one-third sugar. With advertisements featuring an animated, pudgy Krave Krusader, it now counts 456,000 "likes" on Facebook.

Kellogg's said it did not intend to market Krave to tweens and complied with an industry initiative to not market high-fat, high-sugar products to children. "Krave follows Facebook's policy that all fans must be 13 or older," the company said in a statement.

Dr. Victor Strasburger, chief of the division of Adolescent Medicine, University of New Mexico Department of Pediatrics, said the Krave Krusader ads are part of what he called "unethical" appeals by sugary cereal makers. Nearly 20 percent of U.S. children aged 6-17 are obese, according to a 2011 government report.

Child advocates say that even if Facebook is not appealing directly to children, the company needs to realize that ads aimed at teenaged users will also attract tweens, who imitate older peers.

"I don't think Facebook deliberately goes out and gets kids at the moment," said Jeff Chester of the Center for Digital Democracy. "I think when they target teens the way they do, they know that they'll pull in a lot of younger kids.

Twitter Blocks Animated GIFs in Profile Pics

Some Twitter users are expressing major disbelief - after discovering the social network no longer allows them to upload animated GIFs as their personal avatars.

Previously, users had been forced to use workarounds to post animated avatars because of Twitter's profile photo policy. Those tactics appear to have stopped working.

Illustrator Chris Torres, who introduced Nyan Cat to the masses in 2011 and now has a Twitter account with an animated avatar of the meme, experimented unsuccessfully Thursday after hearing the news.

"Oh wow, I just tried to upload an animated avatar on an unused alt account and it didn't animate," Torres told Mashable. "That's scary! But it s also cool knowing we re part of an exclusive animated GIF club."

People with existing animated avatars won't be affected by the GIF freeze-out, according to Twitter's Help Center, which details the company's policy against animated avatars:

We asked Twitter whether the policy became stricter on Thursday or if that's just when people began to take notice, and we're still waiting for a response.

"I've never really seen the big deal on why people look down on those who have animated avatars," says Torres, who thinks Twitter clamped down on GIFs because people were uploading GIFs several megabytes large (Twitter

requires avatar photos, 700 KB or smaller in size).

Some Facebook Posts Are Fair Game for Employer, Says Judge

Should you ever find yourself in the unenviable position of suing your former employer, the company can't gain "broad access" to your social media posts - but they can peek at any communications with fellow employees or posts about your job, even if sent privately on Facebook or Twitter.

That's according to a federal judge in California, who was asked to rule in a discrimination suit against Home Depot - where the big box giant wanted the court to force a former employee to turn over her social media output during the entire period she says she was discriminated against.

Specifically, the company says it wanted any photos she posted, as well as "status updates, wall comments, causes joined, groups joined, activity streams, blog entries from social-networking sites from October 2005 through the present, that reveal, refer, or relate to any emotion, feeling, or mental state of plaintiff."

U.S. Magistrate Judge Suzanne Segal ruled that request was "impermissibly overbroad" and would result in a lot of irrelevant noise. She did, however, grant the request for any of the plaintiff's posts that discuss working at Home Depot, or messages to her fellow employees.

The plaintiff, Danielle Mailhoit, was fired from her job as manager of a Home Depot in Burbank, Calif., in 2010, following a poor performance review. Mailhoit claims she was discriminated against as a woman and because she has crippling vertigo.

Do you think employers should be allowed to access any social media postings or messages in a case like this? Give us your take in the comments.

Five Ways To Kick Your Worst Time-wasting Tech Habits

If biting your fingernails took up eight hours of your time every day, would you, could you, give it up? What if the way you're using email or web search is robbing hours and hours of your life? A recent round of surveys about how we're spending our precious time online shows that most of us are doing the high-tech equivalent of chewing our nails to the quick every day without even realizing it. From getting sucked into social media to throwing away whole hours surfing the web like it's 1999, today's technology should help save time, not waste it.

Here's a look at some of our biggest time-wasting tech habits, along with quick-fix solutions to take back your time right now.

Time Suck Trap #1: Search insanity

According to recent internet use statistics, people waste as much as 70 minutes a day surfing the web for information. Why? Maybe we're just stuck in a Google rut. Collectively, we visit Google 7.2 billion times a

day and make around 3 billion queries. Yet half the time, it seems we never find what we're looking for in the first place.

Time-Saving Solution: Try a new search engine.

The folks at Bing recently dared me to take this new BingItOn Challenge. Like the old Pepsi blind taste test, it pits web search results from Bing against results from Google. It's unbranded, and there aren't any ads, so you don't know which is which. You put in five queries, then declare a winner based on your preferences. Bing bet that I would be so surprised by the results that I would change to Bing as my primary search engine. "Bing it on," I thought, as skeptical as ever.

But guess what? They were right. Bing won. Again and again and again. What I like most about Bing is that the results seem more relevant, more tailored to me and my interests. While replacing any bad habit with a good one takes a little time to get used to, I've already saved about 30 minutes a day by using a new search engine to track down information during my busy day.

Time Suck Trap #2: Social media madness

Americans spend an average of get this 100,000 years worth of time each month on Facebook. Add to that Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, and mobile games like Words With Friends, and it's easy to see why we can't get anything done.

Time-Saving Solution: Automate social media posting.

Use a social media dashboard like Hootsuite to post to all your social media sites at once. It also lets you preschedule social media posts so that you can batch it all into a few hours to go out over a month's time or even longer.

If that's not enough to keep you from reading, Liking, commenting, and pinning all your time away, use an application like RescueTime. It measures all the different things you do on your computer, then gives you detailed reports about how you're spending your digital day. You can also use it to block yourself from sites that you're tempted to visit but know you shouldn't.

Time Suck Trap #3: Email overload

Has your inbox become a landfill, overflowing and overwhelming? The average inbox receives 100 emails per day. Of those 100 emails, only 42% are considered important.

Time-Saving Solution: Manage your mailbox.

This is another example of how it pays off to use modern technology to help manage modern technology. I use a service called Sanebox. It sifts, sorts, and stacks up email according to what's important. It's easy to customize, and it learns from your actions, automatically putting your newsletters in one box, store promotions in another. My favorite feature is that it sends suspected spam to the Black Hole where it belongs. But don't worry, it doesn't ditch an email unless you say it's okay.

Sanebox says it saves people an average of two hours per week from digging through their inboxes (though if you get a ton of emails like I do, I think it saves closer to four).

Time Suck Trap #4: News blues

Now here's an interesting habit I had no clue was wasting so much of my time fishing around for news. According to the Pew Research Center, people spend about 70 minutes a day getting news from TV, radio, newspaper, and now online news sites.

Time-Saving Solution: Centralize your news.

You can get all your print and online news, everything that you need to feel informed, in about 10 minutes using a new app called Wavii (download Wavii for iPhone, iPad, and iPod touch). This service lets you keep up with everything you care about in a personalized news feed and automatically creates status updates for your favorite politicians, celebrities, gadgets, and more.

If you still prefer to listen to the radio for news or just like to have music playing in the background all day, use the ultra-time-saving service TuneIn. It lets you hear what's happening right now from anywhere in the world, all in one place. The free service gives you a simple and streamlined way to listen to the music, sports, news, and podcasts you like. You just personalize your favorites once, so you don't have to waste time channel surfing every time you want to listen to something you like. You can use this in the car and on your smartphone or tablet, not only when you're sitting in front of a computer.

Time Suck Trap #5: Dings, rings, and annoying things

Every time you get a notification alert those dings, rings, clicks, or popup instant message (IM) bubbles on your smartphone or computer it takes your attention away from the task at hand. Even if they don't make a sound (maybe your smartphone screen just lights up when you get an email or new Facebook comment or it's your turn to Draw Something), those distractions kill your concentration and drain your device's battery.

Time-Saving Solution: Turn off alerts.

It sounds so very simple, and it actually is. Whenever you download a new app, it asks you whether to allow push notifications. Hit "don't allow." If alerts are already on your device, go to the start or settings menu, find the notifications center in the drop-down menu, and select "no" for everything you don't want to bug you throughout the day.

It's fine to schedule time to play Words With Friends, IM with your BFF, or scan the latest cute kitten videos on YouTube. But set boundaries and time limits on those activities so that you get in, get out, and get on with a more productive digital day.

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